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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006535

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: GREY WOLVES RE-ELECT PACK LEADER BAHCELI

(C) Classified by Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha. Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Ultra-nationalist MHP delegates Oct. 12 re-elected Devlet Bahceli as party Chairman. Our contacts in the party suggest there will not be many changes either to the party administration or the party line -- deep skepticism towards the EU and US and paranoia concerning Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. Without significant changes, at least in the party hierarchy, contacts outside the party suggest MHP will not be able to regain its 1999 form, when it garnered 19 percent of the vote in the national elections. End Summary.

[12.](#) (C) At an uninspired Oct. 12 party convention attended by poloff, delegates for the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) overwhelmingly supported the re-election of former Deputy PM Devlet Bahceli as party chairman. Bahceli received 688 votes of the 1127 cast. His next closest competitor, long-time MHP grassroots figure Ramiz Ongun, received 300 votes. In a distant third place, Koray Aydin -- whose time as Public Works Minister in the most recent Ecevit government was clouded by corruption allegations -- received 137 votes.

[13.](#) (C) The atmosphere at the MHP convention contrasted starkly with ruling AK Party's scripted convention held on the same day. Perhaps an indicator of internal party tensions, delegates could not agree on the convention's supervisory board until 2 p.m., after which the official proceedings began -- long after the 10 a.m. start time listed in the convention agenda handed out at the gate. Although the convention hall was packed with party supporters, the audience lacked enthusiasm and only offered half-hearted attempts at chanting "Prime Minister Bahceli."

[14.](#) (C) In his address to the crowd, Bahceli strongly criticized the AK Government's Iraq policy, claiming the GOT had surrendered to outside powers. He said the GOT has dishonored Turkey and has not pursued any policies that have benefited the Turkish nation. Opposition CHP Vice Chairman and close Embassy contact Sinan Yerlikaya, who attended the MHP convention, told poloff Oct. 17 that after hearing Bahceli's speech, he believes MHP will react quickly and loudly to any Turkish casualties resulting from a troop deployment to Iraq (Note: CHP also opposes deploying Turkish troops. End Note). In a subsequent Oct. 17 conversation, Huseyin Kocabiyik, who once served as advisor to former PM Ciller and who maintains extensive contacts on the political right, echoed Yerlikaya's sentiment, saying that Bahceli's speech suggests the party will organize its extensive grassroots youth organizations in universities and elsewhere to demonstrate against the GOT, especially if Turkish troops take casualties.

Change of Heart

[15.](#) (C) Following the Nov. 2002 national elections, which left MHP entirely out of Parliament after being the second largest party in the legislature, Bahceli had promised not to stand again for party chairman -- at the time, a nearly unprecedented move by a Turkish political leader. However, in the months leading up to the convention, our MHP contacts began telling us Bahceli would make a comeback.

[16.](#) (C) In a Sept. 24 meeting with poloff, MHP Deputy Secretary General Mehmet Telek said one reason Bahceli

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decided to stand for election again is that he has re-discovered the MHP idealists (Ulkuculer) -- also known as Grey Wolves -- with whom he had tried to break since first becoming MHP chairman in 1997. (Note: Many of our contacts on the political right point to the Bahceli-idealist disconnect as a major factor in the party's failure last Nov. End Note). Telek explained that, originally, Bahceli wanted to disassociate the party from the idealists' deserved reputation for violence. To do so, Bahceli began closing

down idealist organizations and purging the administrative ranks of the more seedy elements. Telek claims that the idealists "have gotten the message" and are now more "moderate." As a result, Bahceli feels more comfortable dealing with this important element of the party's grassroots organization.

What's Next?

17. (C) Our contacts suggest that Bahceli will make at least some changes to the party administration. Mehmet Telek acknowledged that the party will bring in some new faces, but he does not believe there will be very many additions. MHP Vice Chairman and close Embassy contact Sevket Bulent Yahnici told us after the convention that the party assembly will choose MHP executives (Vice Chairmen, administrative board) next week. Yahnici, who has largely withdrawn from party activities and does not expect to serve as Vice Chairman again, was dismissive of any potential changes. He averred that any new party executives will be chosen by the current unsuccessful, Bahceli-led administration. As a result, the party will have the same uninspired leadership with little "vitality," he claimed.

18. (C) Many of our contacts tell us that Bahceli's re-election will not lift MHP out of the doldrums. Kocabiyik claimed that with Bahceli as chairman, MHP supporters may increasingly slide to center-right True Path Party (DYP), led by strong nationalist Mehmet Agar. Yahnici said Bahceli and his team will not be able to rally the party's grassroots to their full potential.

Comment

19. (C) Although our contacts largely dismiss Bahceli and his cronies as uninspiring, MHP is a rooted political phenomenon in Turkey with a solid base of support -- a base with a sordid past. At times, MHP has been able to mobilize this base in support of its hard-line nationalist policies -- including a skepticism towards the EU and US intentions and neuralgia concerning the Kurds. Support for the party could increase if nationalist sentiments rise. Nevertheless, right now support for the party seems a far cry from the numbers it enjoyed in 1999, when voters -- caught up in the nationalist fervor following Ocalan's capture and tired of politics as usual -- made MHP the second largest party in Parliament. Indeed, the party -- its current leadership, in particular -- are still tainted by the perceived failures of the last coalition government.

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